

בס"ד
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פרשת עקב

The second *parsha* of Shema is said towards the end of this week's *parsha*, and with it comes a myriad of lasting lessons that remain tremendously important for us to apply daily, whether it be for ourselves, our family, our community, or even our nation.

The *Or HaChaim*¹ says that the word "והיה" tends to be used as a language of *simcha*, expressing that something which will cause great joy will happen. However, the joy is conditional; it only exists as a "שמחה של מצוה," and fully depends on performing Hashem's *mitzvos*; this is why the *pasuk* says "והיה אם שמוע." According to a Gemara in Shabbos,² the *simcha* that Shlomo HaMelech praises is the happiness that a person creates when they perform a *mitzvah*; to him, all other forms of joy are of no good and accomplish nothing.³ Moshe repeated the word "שמוע" to show that Hashem only supplies wisdom to a person who already has some pre-existing wisdom within them,⁴ as well as a wise heart that is ready to listen to Hashem. Interestingly enough, Bnei Yisrael had no obligation to learn Torah until they had an obligation to fulfill the *mitzvos*, says the *Yalkut Shimoni*.⁵ As a result, the Torah now says "אם שמע תשמעו" to show that they were immediately obligated to perform *mitzvos* at this point in time. This reflects the importance of having a mentality and mindset centered around Torah and *mitzvos*, and is a stark reminder of where our priorities should lie.

There is also the command for Bnei Yisrael to imprint these words on their heart and soul, saying, "וְשַׁמְתֶם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים עַל־לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל־נַפְשְׁכֶם,"⁶ and the Gemara in *Kiddushin*⁷ has a fascinating insight on the word "וְשַׁמְתֶם." Chazal say that the word should be read as **תם סם**, a perfect potion, as the Torah is considered to be the ultimate elixir of life. The following exemplum is given: a father hits his son and bandages his injury. He then tells the son, "If you have the bandage covering your injury, you may bathe, eat, and drink as you please. However, if you take off the bandage, the wound will kill you." So too, Hashem has given us the wound of the *yetzer hara*, and has provided us with the Torah to serve as the bandage. If we engage in the Torah, we will be lifted over the *yetzer hara*, and if we choose not to, we will fall to its power; our fate is in our hands, and our choices control our consequences.

There is a special emphasis placed on educating one's children by the Ramban,⁸ who gives the reason as to why the Torah says both "ושננתם" and "ולמדתם אתם." He says that "ושננתם" is merely about telling one's children the commandments of the Torah, whereas "ולמדתם אתם" is an extension and to the point that the children should know and understand the commandments and their reasons, speaking about it with their parents at all times. The line of "כימי השמים על הארץ" is also a tremendous

1 אור החיים דברים יא:יג ד"ה והיה אם שמוע

2 שבת ל':

3 קהלת ב:ב

4 דניאל ב:כא, ברכות נה.

5 ילקוט שמעוני תתסא

6 דברים יא:יח

7 קידושין ל':

8 רמב"ן דברים יא:יח

lesson, as it teaches that this is for all future generations, and is an enormous responsibility placed on the nation's shoulders.

However, it is not enough for a person to only teach their children, and it is insufficient for children to only be taught by their parents. The *Or HaChaim* asks⁹ why the Torah says “שמור תשמרון,”¹⁰ and answers that one should not only be attentive to their personal observance of the mitzvos; they should encourage others to keep them as well. A person should not simply let others worry about executing their duty, and say that he has fulfilled *his* obligation by observing Hashem's commandments. The word שמור refers to personal adherence, and the word תשמרון refers to one's encouraging others to do the same. There is a note in *Iyun Tefillah* that in the command to educate one's children in the Torah, the *pasuk*¹¹ speaks in the plural, saying “ולמדתם,” while all of the other words in the *pasuk* are in the singular; this is an allusion to a communal responsibility to teach Torah to children. There is a famous African proverb that “it takes a village to raise a child,” and that certainly is an axiom of Klal Yisrael; while one's parents obviously bear the main responsibility to raise their children to be *ovdei Hashem*, they will certainly learn from the examples practiced by their congregation and the general public. This is what Rashi is referring to when he explains¹² “ללכת בכל דרכיו” to mean that just as Hashem is merciful and does *gemilus chasadim*, so too Bnei Yisrael should as well.¹³

The postscript to the second *parsha* of Shema includes the line of “ללכת בכל דרכיו ולדבקה בו,”¹⁴ that we should walk in all of Hashem's ways and cleave to Him. But how is this feasible? Is Hashem not an “אש אוכלת,” a consuming fire?¹⁵ The way to accomplish this, explains Rashi,¹⁶ is to hold by and adhere to the *talmidim* and the *chachamim*, as doing so will be considered as if one has clung to Hashem. The Gemara in Kesubos¹⁷ elaborates further, saying that this *pasuk* teaches that anyone who marries his daughter to a *talmid chacham* or conducts business and utilizes his wealth to benefit *talmidei chachamim* is considered to be cleaving to the *Shechinah*. The Rambam provides additional instruction, commenting in *Hilchos De'os*¹⁸ that a person can also accomplish this by marrying the daughter of a *talmid chacham* and marrying their daughter to *talmid chacham*. By surrounding oneself in an ambiance and atmosphere of Torah, a person can attach themselves to Hashem, and by creating a lineage that is entrenched and established in such morals, a person fulfills the commandment of “ולדבקה בו.” If we espouse and embrace the values and virtues that Hashem encompasses, and properly prioritize them, in addition to making Torah engagement the focal point of our lives, we will be able to follow in *all* of Hashem's ways.

⁹ אור החיים יא:כב

¹⁰ דברים יא:כב

¹¹ דברים יא:יט

¹² רש"י דברים יא:כב ד"ה ללכת בכל דרכיו

¹³ ספרי דברים מט:א

¹⁴ דברים יא:כב

¹⁵ דברים ד:כד

¹⁶ רש"י יא:כב ד"ה ולדבקה בו

¹⁷ כתובות קיא:

¹⁸ משנה תורה הלכות דעות פרק ו הלכה ב